Reminiscence

"Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? " Job XXXVIII 2

The Witchery" in Edinburgh, just next to the Castle, serves a starter of exquisite locally cured salmon with fennel sorbet and a sprinkling of dill. The icy, savoury joy of the sorbet has the peculiar effect of rendering the salmon hot and sweet to the yearning, proud tastebuds. The discriminating diner will be aware of cuisine that has him giggling with delight - this hors d'oeuvre has such an effect. When a thing of beauty presents itself in all its splendour and exquisitely wrought symmetry, sometimes one can only respond with Homeric fou rire. And 'I confess that as the following effect came together, it had me grinning like a twat.

This is not to say that I have discovered perfection, but "Reminiscence" is for me something close enough for now. It has its origins in an effect by Kenton Knepper to be found on the 'Wonder Words' tapes, and perhaps beyond that in Docc Hillford's Q&A act that I had seen some time previously. I have taken the notion of ambiguous scripts and double-talk used in their effects to achieve some profoundly disturbing mind reading. The first time I performed this at a magic convention, I had a good few magicians and mentalists believe I was doing the real thing. Consider the following:

A genuine volunteer is taken from the audience (this is a parlour effect) and gently hypnotised. Whilst entranced, she chooses an area of her life such as 'Romance', 'Health', 'Travel', 'Finance' and so on, by selecting a tarot-like card that corresponds to that area. She is told to build in her mind a picture associated with that area, which may be a memory or constructed from her imagination. Once she has a picture, she is told to step inside it and look around, noting as many details as possible.

Nothing is written down or drawn by the spectator, and she need only answer the performer briefly from her trance-state from this point on. The performer closes his eyes too and begins to describe the picture that the spectator is seeing. She confirms that the details are correct. Let us imagine that she has picked the 'Romance' card and is remembering a meal with a boyfriend from when she was eighteen. The performer is able to tell her precisely what she is picturing, and such things as the name of her boyfriend and the type of restaurant as he wishes, without using cold

reading. Using hypnotic regression he encourages her to experience the picture more vividly and is soon able to offer staggering detail such as the colour of the napkins, the music played in the restaurant and a description of the waiter. Some of this information he merely states and has her confirm. However, to ensure that the audience does not just think that she is merely agreeing with whatever he says, he asks questions about the memory but writes down the answers on a whiteboard or pad, in full view of the audience before she replies.

Once the picture has been accurately described, right down to the last detail, the performer suggests further tests. He asks her to think of a two-digit number, and then invites another member of the audience to join him. The second volunteer is hypnotised and given the pen and board. A demonstration of automatic writing ensues, where this second volunteer allows the pen to move across the board outside of consciousness. When the writing is finished, the board is turned around to show the number. The first lady then names the number of which she was thinking - and it matches exactly.

Finally the performer asks her to think of a celebrity, and he starts sketching a caricature on the board, again in full view. He finishes and the volunteer names the celebrity of her choice: the performer is correct again. Fin.

This may sound impossible, and indeed I hope that it does. The spectator is not playing along or acting as a confederate, and she is genuinely remembering the information asked for. The effect can be repeated with a different spectator who will of course think of an entirely different event or image. There is no pre-show work, and the effect is extremely strong in performance.

The effect was born out of a desire to perform mind reading exactly as it should look, with no compromise in handling or presentation. The means of deception is, in essence, rather simple, but there are layers of secondary deception that bolster the first and make it impenetrable. Let us look at the methodology, which is almost synonymous with the presentation.

If she is merely to think of the information and you are to know it, how can this be done without genuine mind reading? Answer - tell her what to think. How to do this without her being in on the trick? Answer - control two effects at the same time: in the first trick, performed for the audience, you are describing a memory from the spectator's past as described above. In the second, simultaneous trick, performed for the individual

spectator, the audience is able to pick up correct impressions from her, as she visualises some information that she has been given to remember. The two effects can run together due to the fact that when hypnotised, the subject on stage has her eyes closed, and therefore cannot see your actions that tie in with the words you speak. Those words will mean two very different things to the audience on one hand and the spectator on the other.

So the spectator believes that she is to memorise some information and transmit it to the audience. Where does she get this information from? The card that she removes from the set of category cards. One card is forced. The audience do not see the face of this card (although they do after you've exchanged it), and the subject does not see the faces of the rest of the pack. Neither knows of the discrepancy involved.

The audience sees only cards similar to this:

Whereas your subject sees a card bearing the following:

ROMANCE: The Italian Restaurant

Remember and visualise all of this:

It is your 18th BIRTHDAY and you are having a meal with PETER The waiter is VERY SHORT

There are RED and GREEN NAPKINS on the table. There is NO MUSIC in the

restaurant.

Peter has a **BLACK** shirt with a large number **22** on it.
FINALLY - Next to the table is a big picture of **WOODY ALLEN**.

I force the card by severely rigging the deck. Ten or so cards are made up bearing the various category headings, and on top of these rests fifteen or so blanks that are strung together through the centre. The face card of the strung packet bears the legend, "TRAVEL". Between the two sections rests the force card, which is shortened and narrowed. You must also make this card doublethickness, to avoid the problem of the writing showing through during performance. When the subject cuts the deck, she will do so directly to the force in a way that feels absolutely natural. On top of the assembled deck is placed the real Romance card, which will be top-changed for the subject's one a little later. For the start of the effect, place the force card on the very top of the deck, where it must reside for now. There is our basic deception.

You must also use a white-board and marker, along with a cloth for erasing. In your right pocket is a duplicate pen with the ink source removed and the nib also empty and dried up. When you begin the routine, place this pen on the chair just to your right.

Now we must look at the words used to make it elegant and appear real.

Firstly, a lady is borrowed from the audience and hypnotised. In my routine, I have already hypnotised her for the 'Lift' effect, so I can re-induce the state quite quickly. I look her in the eyes, place my hand on her shoulder, and tell her to look at my eyes and to feel the weight of her own eyelids. I then switch my focus so that I am looking though her, knowing that this will make her feel a
little dissociated, and then start to mirror her blinking, while relaxing myself fully. She is seated and I am standing by her side, so she must look up at me. This means that her eyes will naturally tire after a while. But my non-verbal suggestion given by my blinking which becomes slow and heavy, and my accompanying encouragement of "That's right" and so on as her blinking becomes more laboured, will soon have her relaxing deeply and closing her eyes. I then gently push her head forward and down and gently push down on her shoulders to slump her further. This will have the effect of increasing the trance-like state that she is experiencing.

I then remove the cards, which I have often wrapped in a handkerchief to suggest that they are tarot-like in nature. I use the following as a basic script as I talk, which will suggest to the audience that the subject will invent a picture from one of the headings, while for the subject slumped in the chair, I could just as easily be describing cards that show lists of information that she is to memorise and visualise.

"People who perform psychic readings know that the areas of concern in people's lives fall into some classic and predictable categories. These cards (I begin to casually display them, peeling off the cards into my right hand, showing the faces) show such headings, and as you can see, each heading gives you a whole list of images, and details that can be visualised to form one picture. 'The Future', 'Finance', 'Dreams'...and so on. (I reach 'Travel' and peel the force card from the back onto the back of the last of the category cards.) For example, if I picked Travel, I would think of a recent trip to Germany, the chicken that the stewardess served me for lunch, the coffee stain on the chair, the bumpy landing in Frankfurt - all these details and images that I can put together to form one picture."

I walk across to the spectator and place the pile of cards face down on the table. I tell the subject to open her eyes whilst still remaining in the trance, relaxed and heavy. She does so, and I instruct her to reach over and cut the pack into two. She does so, directly to the force. I take the force card from the pile and hand it to her, saying, "Take the card and focus on it. Use it to form a picture visualise those details and images that come under that heading and project it onto the card as if it were a screen. This picture is what you will project to the audience, and we shall see how well they pick it all up.„

A few points about this. By telling her to remain in the trance as she opens her eyes, and by keeping her actions a little laboured by speaking rather slowly to her, the fact that she is going to apparently stare at this card will be explained to the audience as her still sleepy response. Similarly, telling her to project the image onto it and to "not give anything away by looking around", she will have a motivation in the audience's eyes for looking at the card for a long time. In reality, of course, she is spending time reading the information written on it. This will now seem perfectly natural to the audience. However, you now stand in front of her, blocking the audience's view, and address the audience.

"The rest of you, please put your feet flat on the floor and your hands on your laps. Your task is to relax and pick up the images in S's mind. Now, there is nothing psychic about this. We have all had the experience of sitting in conversation with a friend and suddenly knowing that they are

about to look at their watch and say that they must be going. How do we know? Because we are in strong rapport with them, and when in that state it is common to suddenly know what they are about to say or do. This is the same process. Let your breathing become relaxed, and just allow the impressions to come into your mind as we do this. Sir, you may also wish to check the pen and board that I will be using throughout this." I hand someone the pen and board. All this has given our subject time to visualise the contents of the list.

I retrieve the props from the audience member, and place them on the table. To do so, however, I first reassemble the cut pack and pick it up in my left hand. I take the card from the subject and tell her to allow her eyes to close. In the action of bringing my left hand to her head, I top change the top card for her force card, and leave the real 'Romance' card face down on the table. To facilitate this, I ensure that she is seated to my right, and just back a little from the table. This way I can walk behind the table to her, and take the card in my right hand as my left comes up to her face. The exchange is done cleanly as the hands pass, with the right hand's card remaining, apparently stationary throughout. I then drop the new card on the table, and ensure that no clutter builds up throughout the routine, so that the audience maintains a clear view of the card throughout.

The rest is easy, but there are some subtleties that improve the proceedings. I first tell her that I will ask her some questions about the picture that she has in her mind, but that I will be very specific when I want her to tell me what she sees - otherwise she is just to answer 'Yes' or 'No'. I begin by asking her to think of the environment that she imagines.

"Can you do that for me?"

"Yes„

[To audience] "I would like you all to now form a picture in your mind of where S is in this picture. I shall write this down: What... is ... the ... place".

[I write 'Italian Restaurant' on the board, pause, and then show it. Remember that you are trying to create in your volunteer's mind the idea that the audience is picking up her impressions. She must think that you have written something like 'Where Is The Place?' on the board and that the audience have formed their own answers]

"S, can you tell me the place that you are imagining?"

"A restaurant"

"Is there a particular nationality associated with this restaurant?"

"Italian"

[If you have played this correctly, there will be a massive gasp from the audience at this point, which your volunteer will interpret as their reaction to having all guessed the location correctly themselves. Remember, she will not be too impressed if she thinks that you are divining the information yourself, and indeed may become suspicious. Therefore you must sustain through subtle use of nonvisual cues, the notion in her mind that the audience are, as much as possible reacting to their own success in correctly guessing what she is about to say]

"Italian. Perfect. Thank you. Am I right in thinking that this is not a recent event, but rather one associated with an earlier time?"

"Yes"

"Please then think of the time associated with this. I shall write this down. Everybody, we are now after the event or time. I shall write that down."

[I write '18th Birthday' on the board and continue as before]

Once it is established that this is an event from the past, I can now ask her if she can remember the information that I am after. When I say, "Ah, there's a waiter in your picture, yes? Watch him walk past - is there anything about him that you can remember?" she will understand that I mean "Can you remember from the card", while the audience obviously believe that she is remembering a real event in the past. This business with the waiter always gets a laugh which was unplanned and interesting. The fact that the audience are so engaged in the process that they respond to the sudden mention of the waiter with laughter (suggesting, I suppose, possible flirtatious thoughts on the part of our volunteer), struck me as very positive. The illusion that we are actually talking about the volunteer's thoughts is made much more compelling by this bit of by-play.

By telling her to visualise the picture brightly and vividly, you can give the impression that you are actually regressing her into the memory. When I ask her to think about the music, I listen with her for a while (moving my eyes from side to side as one does when one listens for sounds) and then frown. I write 'No Music' on the board, and then ask her what was playing. When she answers the same, I act relieved.

Before coming to the colour of the napkins, I draw another spectator from the audience. I may perform the Three of Diamonds verbal force described elsewhere as a test with him. If it fails, I ask for someone who did think of the Three. This is done very sincerely, as if I need a responsive type for the experiments that lay ahead. I hypnotise him in a chair to my left. He is instructed to imagine a channel between his mind and the subject's. I tell her to visualise the colour of the napkins, and after some consideration I ask her if she has in fact two colours in her mind. She agrees. I tell the chap to the left to allow the picture of the napkins to form in his mind, and then I hand him the pen and board. I tell him to write down the colours that he senses to be correct. The colours on the card - red and green are the most obvious choices, and generally he will write those colours on the board. I also ask the audience to allow their minds to settle on two colours as well, knowing that many of them will choose the force colours.

Show what he has written. If he is wrong, I express doubt as to his choice, and say, "Well, I was getting these colours very strongly. Was anyone else?", while writing 'Red' and 'Green' on the board myself. Invariably there is a strong affirmative response from the audience. Then I ask the subject to name the colours. The audience will now respond to their own accuracy, forgetting the fact that the recipient volunteer was wrong. In fact, this failure on his part will increase the audience response to his correct writing of the number, which follows a little later.

At this point I casually turn to the first subject and say, "I definitely feel that this is a romantic meal. Did you pick the Romance card?" (She answers with a 'Yes') "Who else thought this too?", I ask, as I pick up the card from the table and casually wave its face in a gesture. This is a vital convincer. I give them just enough time to begin to ask procedural questions and then blow the only possible solution out of the water by showing the card.

Finally, to the number and celebrity picture. Here, the audience believe that we move away from the Italian Restaurant memory and start working with random ideas. This is accomplished by the following. The last item to be written by me is the colour of Peter's shirt:

"Can you concentrate on the colour of Peter's shirt? It's got something on it I believe, but please think of the colour."

[I write 'Black' on the board and show the audience. She then names it and I erase it, with the board facing me. My hand with the cloth also holds the pen, and I secretly, but casually, scribble '22' on the board during the

moment of relaxed attention as the audience respond to the revelation of the colour. I then place the board face down on the table and sit down]

"Let's try something different. S, can you see a 2-digit number in front of you? A 2-digit number."

[With each '2' I tap her on the shoulder. This may or may not remind her of the number, but it will offer a very subtle red herring to audience members that are watching carefully. Obviously, the number 'in front of her is the number on the shirt, which was mentioned last for that reason]

I stand up with the board, and leave my pen on the chair, picking up the empty pen in its place. I approach the spectator to my left and ask him if he is right- or left-handed. He, remember, is also slumped with his eyes closed. I give him the pen in writing position, telling him to mind his fingers on the nib. I give him the board in his other hand, being obviously careful not to flash the number at the audience. I place his hands so that the board is upright, steady, and with the nib against it, just below the number written. I then talk to the audience about automatic writing, explaining that the trick is to allow the hand to move out of consciousness. To allow him to do this, I have him count out loud backwards from five hundred, and to allow the pen to move as he does so. Many will find this task difficult, and may need encouragement. Of course the point of this is to deliberately stop them from knowing what they have written. This part of the routine brought an extra smile to my face as I walked around Bristol planning it.

If I notice that he is performing the task well, I tell him that I will click my fingers and he will stop counting and find that his hand will freeze with the pen. This is a nice touch - suddenly he cannot write. Then I click again, telling him that his hand and counting will automatically continue.

When I feel that enough time has passed, I take the pen from him in my right hand, and the board in my left. I sit down, and turn the board around, as my right hand dips to the chair and exchanges the pen again. I suggest that his writing may not be very clear, and to clarify what he has written, I write '22' in brackets underneath the number. This provides me with an excuse to immediately use the pen, which will remove any suspicion from it should anyone try and backtrack.

The subject names her number as twenty-two and the audience is deeply impressed. There is always a response of real awe at this point.

For the finale, I say to her, "Finally, can you see a picture of a celebrity?". To the rest of the audience she appears to be thinking of someone at random, but in reality she is remembering the final piece of information from the card. Now, I wish her to think that someone in the audience is going to draw her celebrity - again, this would be more impressive in her mind than me getting the information. Here's how I do it. I take the board and pen and stand near the front row of the audience. I tell the group to allow the image of a celebrity to float into their minds. I ask, "Have you got a picture?", but do so in such a way that could mean I was talking to one person. I then close my eyes and make to draw, but hesitate. I then say to myself, "Take the pen, and draw what you see", as if I am giving myself instructions to focus. My volunteer will hear this and begin to imagine that I have given the board to someone else. I then start sketching, but because I am standing so far forward, she will hear the pen squeaking from the audience and the illusion is confirmed. Eventually I finish the sketch, which is a caricature of Woody Allen, presuming I am using the card given above as an illustration. When I am done, I say, "Well I think I can tell who that is." Handing the board and pen to someone in the front row, I add, "Keep hold of the board for a minute". I then return to the volunteer.

I say to her, "In a moment I shall awaken you. I would like you to keep the image of the celebrity firmly in your mind for when you are awake. But first I want to thank you for joining in, and to add something very important. When you awaken, a lot of people will ask you exactly what you remember from all of this, and they will try and find nut what was going on. Now you'll find that you've forgotten pretty much everything, and that anything else is very hazy - but don't be alarmed, this is perfectly normal. It is standard and normal and comfortable to forget all the stuff that we did up here - to remember to forget everything on awakening. 1 just want to tell you that now so that when people try and make you talk about it, you understand why you've forgotten". This is all said comfortingly, and then I count her awake, ensuring that she feels bright and alert. The business of waking a subject fully is extremely important, and worth spending some time over. Any subject coming out of a hypnotic experience should be left feeling alert and happy.

Now, she will awaken and see the audience member with the pen and board. Clearly she will believe that he has drawn whatever is upon it. It only remains for me to instruct her to say in a clear voice, the name of the celebrity on her mind. The audience responds wildly, as I retrieve the picture from the chap at the front and show it all around.

If the subject has responded to the suggestion to forget everything, then

the miracle will never be undone. The one person who could alert the audience to the deception can't remember a thing. The important points in wording the suggestion to forget revolve around the firstly that I am not telling her directly to forget: the issue is whether or not it should worry her that she has forgotten. The presupposition is that the information is not remembered. Secondly, I say that people may 'try' to 'make' her explain what happened. The subtle presupposition here is that they will fail in doing so.

One of the joys of this routine is that I never know exactly how much she will remember correctly, or exactly how things will go. I have changed the card many times to make it as easy as possible for her to recall the information upon it, but occasionally an unforeseen situation will occur. However, the nature of the deception gives me a great escape route. For example, at a recent show, I drew the picture of Woody Allen and after much build up told the subject to name the celebrity. This was to be the climax of the evening. She named Princess Diana. Of course this was a highly comic moment, as the tension was released for everyone. I laughed with the group, genuinely enjoying the joke, then held up my hand. "Be honest," I said. "Does Woody Allen ring a bell? Did you have him first and change your mind?" I showed her the picture. She looked at it and then looked at me with a confused expression. "Yeah, “she replied, "... there was a picture of Woody Allen in the restaurant next to the table."

I couldn't have engineered a better climax.

It is important when performing this that I believe that I am doing what the audience believes. That is, I must act it out convincingly, and take the hypnosis seriously. At the same time, however, I must be careful not to suggest to the subject that the audience believes this to be a genuine memory, for then she will realise the deception and feel that she is supposed to play along. While this does not damage the effect, I feel as a point of elegance, the subject must be left with no idea of the ambiguity of the proceedings. The joy of performing this comes from maintaining the two separate effects in a way that is seamless. Some of the time, the subject will respond well to the hypnosis and will clearly be experiencing the memory as if it were real. This is extremely convincing to the audience. She will smile as I ask her if the meal is a romantic one, and talk as if it were a real memory. This I will milk for all it is worth, and I can encourage her response by telling her to step into the picture and make it large and vivid around her. The more she feels herself in the picture, the more she will communicate its reality to the audience.

I have prepared a few cards bearing different information so that I can

repeat the effect on a different date without giving away the method to those that may have seen it before.

This is an extremely strong routine. With it I finish my current set, and also this book.